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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN IRAQ SITUATION REPORT: MARCH 26, 23:00
LOCAL

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S/NF) Summary and comment: The below is a situation report for Basrah and other southern provinces, reflecting reporting from PRTs and REOs, open-source media, and Embassy Baghdad. In Basrah, militants have entrenched themselves in several neighborhoods in response to the ISF offensive. Tensions persist between national and provincial GOI leadership. According to military assessments, JAM is able to resist ISF for at least another 24-48 hours, if not longer.

¶2. (S/NF) Meanwhile ongoing violence in Basrah will continue to fuel unrest throughout the south, particularly in urban areas dominated by JAM. Most of south-central Iraq remains tense but stable, but the situation in Maysan and Wasit has deteriorated since March 25 with multiple reports of JAM violence against ISF and government targets. The seeming inability of Sadrists politicians to rein in JAM is revealing deep fissures within the movement. However, the longer the violence continues the greater the chance that ongoing ISF operations will provide a rallying cry to unite moderates and militant strands within the Sadrists movement. End summary and comment.

Fighting continues in Basrah

¶3. (S/NF) In Basrah fighting continues between ISF and JAM, with JAM heavily entrenched in several key neighborhoods. ISF have made some gains but experienced some disturbing losses. At least 2 IP stations have been overrun, and militants have taken control of an ISF ammunition depot. A large number of residents have fled, anticipating that these neighborhoods will be the decisive battle for control of the city. According to MND-SE, ISF have cordoned off all major routes into Hayyaniya. In Timimyah, another JAM stronghold, two prominent JAM members were reported killed. The CBOC has moved into the Shatt Al Arab hotel and has taken heavy fire. The situation has also deteriorated outside of Basrah, with 2 IP stations overrun in az-Zubayr and 2 private security contractors killed by an IED in the oil fields.

¶4. (S/NF) At approximately 1400 on March 26, REO spoke with PM Maliki and Amer Al-Faiz, Head of the Legal Support Committee. Al-Faiz said Sadrists approached him and the PM to request negotiations. The PM stressed the importance of reestablishing rule of law, adding that he would not disrupt operations to give criminals time to regain strength. As a compromise facilitated by Al-Faiz, the PM offered a 72 hour deadline for militants to surrender heavy and medium weapons and explosives and hand over specific criminals to the ISF. REO also spoke with Gen Mohan. While his role remains

unclear, he is still very involved in operations. Mohan said flyers were dropped this afternoon in Hyyaniyah, a JAM stronghold, advising civilians to keep their distance from militants. According to the latest reports Mohan is leading troops on the ground.

¶ 15. (S//NF) REO called Governor Wa'eli to ask about his role in the operation. Wa'eli said he received a phone call from the PM requesting his assistance but reportedly remains unsupportive of the operation. According to Wa'eli, Maliki asked him to coordinate the handover of weapons with militia and community leaders in the city.

Maysan and Wasit: Situation deteriorating

¶ 16. (S/NF) Muhammed Wahid Khalil, the government-appointed PRT security contact, confirmed that an IA convoy was attacked on March 25 due to rumors that the IA intended to conduct operations in Amarah. Khalil also confirmed that an oil pipeline was destroyed but blamed the destruction on local tribes.

¶ 17. (S/NF) Maysan PRT also reported that two local businessmen blamed JAM for: attacking IP checkpoints and killing 5 policemen; destroying the oil pipeline in Musharah; attacking a GRS-constructed 400kv power station; burning local Badr offices. The contacts said JAM has taken over Amarah and that local residents are afraid to leave their homes. The Maysan Chief of Justice said that JAM went into local courthouses and expelled all of the officials. There are media reports that JAM burned down the local Da'wa office on March 25. Military reporting confirms that a local power station was destroyed and that ISF have withdrawn from Amarah due to JAM attacks. Crews attempting to fight fires at the damaged oil pipeline have been forced to withdraw due to small arms fire.

¶ 18. (S/NF) In Wasit fighting between ISF and militant JAM members began on March 25 and further escalated on March 26. Sadrists politicians have made public statements urging JAM to respect the cease-fire but have admitted they are unable to control the violence. In late morning and early afternoon, militia focused attacks on the Governance Center and intelligence reports indicated militants may be trying to assassinate the Wasit governor. In late afternoon, 8th IA Division CG, an additional IA company and ODA with Kut SWAT reinforced ISF. As of 2100 hours, PC Chairman, Mohammed Hasan Jabir, told PRT that ISF had reestablished control of central Al Kut. Southern Kut neighborhoods are still reportedly controlled by militia. IP reported &many8 arrests and casualties.

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